

Week of October 21, 2002: MDOT Flash Facts

Topic: School bus safety

Facts or Openers for the week:

- Most of us have gotten used to schools being open, with school buses being back on the road and the presence of students traveling to and from school.
- Since daylight hours are becoming shorter, you now may be encountering buses or students during hours of darkness (including transporting kids to games and other extra-curricular activities). Keep our kids safe.

Nationwide:

- 450,000 school buses provide student transportation service.
- About 24 Million elementary and secondary school children ride school buses daily.
- Approximately 10,000 children are injured daily in school bus crashes.
- An average of 11 children are fatally injured inside school buses and another 15 die each year (as pedestrians) in the school bus loading and unloading zone.
- Each Year, about 800 school-aged children are killed in motor-vehicle crashes during normal school travel hours.

Maine:

- Approximately 2,000 school buses carry about 170,000 students an estimated 32 Million miles each year.
- There are over 100 school bus crashes each year, resulting in more than 50 injuries.

Maine Laws:

Buses

- A vehicle may not proceed until the school bus resumes motion or until signaled by the school bus operator that it is okay to proceed.
- A school bus operator who observes someone illegally passing a stopped school bus may report the violation to a law enforcement officer.
- The minimum total cost of a fine and expenses for passing a stopped school bus is \$297.50 plus three points for the first offense, and a mandatory 30 day license suspension for a second offense that occurs within three years of the first offense.

School Zones

- The speed limit is 15 miles per hour when children are going to or leaving school during school opening or closing hours, or during recess.

-Though you would think people know about the law and the dangers to students in school zones and of passing a stopped school bus, violations still occur. (Here are some figures from 7/1/01 through 6/30/02):

- Speeding in school zone - 443 violations

-Passing a school bus:

Civil Infraction (fine only) - 69

Criminal Violation (fine plus points) - 301

(passing a school bus is considered a criminal violation.)

Monday

Tips:

- Slow down in School Zones and watch for children.
- When you see an approaching school bus, be ready to stop, especially if yellow school bus lights are flashing.
- Fully stop your vehicle when red school bus lights are flashing and watch for kids who may be crossing the street.
- Make sure headlights are on during dusk and dawn hours. (Children are often going to or returning from school during these times. Remember, school buses are also on the road in the evening, bringing kids home from sports and other after school activities.)
- Be extra cautious in inclement weather and when road conditions may be wet or slippery.
- Keep a safe three-second following distance behind a school bus. You will have a better view of the road ahead and an adequate distance to come to a stop.
- Remember, school buses must stop at railroad crossings.

- Use extreme care in any area where children may be present, such as:
 - where there are school safety patrols or crossing guards
 - in school zones and pedestrian crossings
 - where you see bikes or school buses parked
 - near parks and playgrounds
 - residential areas and intersections
 - around parked cars

Like Flash, the MaineDOT Road Model says, "We all need to slow down."

Be a Road Model every day.

Wednesday

Tips:

Kids, remember (and parents, remind your kids) how to stay safe on and around school buses:

- Stand back when waiting for an arriving bus, and approach door only after the bus has come to a complete stop.
- Stay seated during the school bus trip.
- Keep all materials and yourself inside bus windows.
- Keep the noise down so that the driver can hear.
- Listen to the driver's instructions.

Parents, if you are driving the kids to school:

- When parking, do not block visibility of children or motorists.
- Leave yourself enough time for the drive so you do not feel rushed on the road.
- Follow the school's rules about loading and unloading passengers.
- Make sure everyone in the vehicle is properly buckled up.
- Use the curb side car door when dropping kids off.
- Watch your speed!

Friday
Facts/Openers:

Tips for kids:

When waiting for a bus,

- Stay a safe distance back from the roadway
- Avoid horseplay (may unintentionally cause you to go into the roadway)
- Wear reflective clothing and avoid dark clothing, especially when your day is starting or ending in twilight or darkness.
- When crossing the street, make eye contact with the driver and make sure they know you are there. Before starting to cross, stop at the curb or before the edge of the road, get a clear view looking left-right-then left again.
- Do not cross between vehicles.
- As you cross, keep looking for vehicles.
- A parked car that is running or has a driver in it may be moving soon, so make sure they know you are crossing.
- Walk, do not run.

Other school bus safety reminders:

- Use the handrail to enter and exit the bus.
- If crossing in front of a bus, make sure you can see the driver and that they can see you.
- Never walk behind a bus.
- Never bend down near or under a bus.
- If you drop something near a bus, FIRST tell the bus driver. (Never pick it up first, because the driver may not see you.)

-When leaving a bus:

- look to the rear of the bus before stepping off the bottom step, just to make sure no vehicle is illegally trying to pass on the shoulder.
- take 10 giant steps straight out the door to get you out of the “danger zone” (the area where the school bus driver can not see you through the bus windows or easily in the mirrors), and keep at least that distance between you and the bus.
- Be aware of the traffic around. Although all drivers should be paying attention and following the rules of the road, they sometimes do not. Watch out and keep safe.

Flash, the MaineDOT safety spokesman wants everyone to be a Road Model.